

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

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USCINCEUR
USDOCOSOUTH NAPLES
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USEEC

E.O. 11652: NA
TAGS: PINT, ELAB, TU
SUBJECT: POLITICAL TRENDS ANALYSIS: THE POLITICAL ROLE OF ORGANIZED
LABOR IN TURKEY

1. BEGIN SUMMARY: THE TURKISH LABOR MOVEMENT HAS BEEN
SINCE ITS INCEPTION 30 YEARS AGO A PRIME TARGET FOR POLITICIANS
AT THE SAME TIME THAT IT HAS TRIED TO DEVELOP POLITICAL INFLUENCE
FOR ITS OWN GOALS. THE CONFLICT OVER LABOR'S POLITICAL ROLE
REMAINS UNRESOLVED. THE CONFEDERATION OF TURKISH TRADE
UNIONS (TURK-IS) HAS TAKEN A POSTURE OF REMAINING ABOVE PARTY
POLITICS AND OF WORKING WITH ALL PARTIES HAVING THE SAME AIMS AS
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LABLR. ADVOCATES OF POLITICAL ACTIVISM, HOWEVER, HAVE CONTINUOUSLY
CHALLENGED THAT POSTURE, SPLITTING THE LABOR MOVEMENT IN 1967
AND CURRENTLY IMPOSING SEVERE STRAINS ON THE UNITY OF TURK-IS
ITSELF. TODAY THE TRADE UNIONS' INFLUENCE ON THE POLITICAL PARTIES
IS AT ITS NADIR, AND BOTH MAJOR CONFEDERATIONS FACE CRISES OVER
THEIR POLITICAL ORIENTATION. HOWEVER, FURTHER FRAGMENTATION OF
THE TWO MILLION STRONG LABOR MOVEMENT IS AN UNLIKELY POSSIBILITY.

IN THE BROAD POLITICAL CONTEXT THE PROSPECTS FOR LABOR'S INFLUENCE
LIE PRIMARILY IN THE SOCIO-POLITICAL CHANGES WROUGHT THROUGH
COLLECTIVE BARGAINING, WHEREBY THE TRADE UNIONS HAVE ALREADY SUCCEED-
ED IN ADVANCING SIGNIFICANTLY THE STATUS OF INDUSTRIAL WORKERS.
END SUMMARY

2. EARLY DEVELOPMENT: IN ITS FORMATIVE YEARS (1952-1960),
THE WEAK TURKISH LABOR MOVEMENT--THEN REPRESENTED ONLY BY
THE TURK-IS CONFEDERATION--WAS UNDER THE STRONG INFLUENCE OF
THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY (DP) FOLLOWED BY THE REPUBLICAN PEOPLE'S
PARTY (RPP). ONLY BY THE EFFORTS OF STRONG LEADERSHIP ELECTED IN
1960 WAS THE LABOR MOVEMENT ABLE TO FREE ITSELF FROM PARTISAN
CONTROLS AND TO DEVELOP ITS OWN INFLUENCE. AFTER A BRIEF
FLIRTATION WITH THE IDEA OF BUILDING A WORKERS' PARTY, TURK-IS
ADOPTED ITS POSTURE OF REMAINING "ABOVE PARTY POLITICS" AND
ITS POLICY OF WORKING THROUGH THE PARTIES IN POWER SO LONG AS
THEIR POLICIES WERE COMPATIBLE WITH THE AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF
ORGANIZED LABOR.

3. THE CONTINUING CLEAVAGE OVER LABOR'S POLITICAL ROLE:

A. POLITICAL ACTIVISTS WERE NOT CONTENT WITH THE "ABOVE
PARTY POLITICS" APPROACH, AND A GROUP OF TURK-IS TRADE UNIONISTS
JOINED WITH SOME OUTSIDE LEFTISTS AND HELPED FORM THE TURKISH LABOR
PARTY (TLP) IN 1967, LATER SPLITTING OFF TO ESTABLISH THE
CONFEDERATION OF TURKISH REVOLUTIONARY/REFORMIST TRADE UNIONS
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(DISK). THE TLP WAS DECLARED ILLEGAL IN 1971, AND SINCE 1973
DISK HAS GIVEN ITS SUPPORT TO THE RPP.

B. ANOTHER GROUP, STYLING THEMSELVES SOCIAL DEMOCRATS,
SOUGHT TO EMULATE LABOR POLITICIANS OF NORTHERN EUROPE AND
ADVOCATED LINKAGE OF TURK-IS WITH THE RPP. THE SOCIAL DEMOCRATS
HAVE FAILED TO GAIN ASCENDANCY, AND THEIR PERENNIAL COMPETITION
WITH THE CONSERVATIVES, PRIMARILY SUPPORTERS OF THE JUSTICE
PARTY (JP), HAS CREATED SEVERE STRAINS ON THE UNITY OF TURK-
IS. SOME SOCIAL DEMOCRATS, NOTABLY ABDULLAH BASTURK,
PRESIDENT OF GENEL-IS, MUNICIPAL WORKERS' UNION, AND MUKBIL
ZIRTILOGLU, PRESIDENT OF OLEY-IS, HOTEL WORKERS' UNION, LED
THEIR UNIONS OUT OF TURK-IS AND JOINED DISK.

C. TURK-IS TODAY IS SHARPLY DIVIDED BETWEEN THE SOCIAL
DEMOCRATS WHO WANT LABOR TO BRING THE RPP TO POWER AND THE
CONSERVATIVES WHO SUPPORT PRIME MINISTER DEMIREL, THE JP
CHARIMAN. UNABLE TO AGREE ON A MEANINGFUL RESPONSE TO THE
SITUATION, TURK-IS IS RAPIDLY LOSING MUCH OF ITS INFLUENCE IN
POLITICS. AT ITS RECENT MEETING IN BURSA, THE TURK-IS
MANAGEMENT BOARD DECIDED TO AVOID INVOLVEMENT IN THE LOCAL
ELECTIONS AND INSTEAD CONCENTRATED ITS ATTENTION ON A NEW

ORGANIZATIONAL DRIVE AND PROGRAM FOR WORKERS' EDUCATION.

D. A SIMILAR DICHOTOMY HAS ARISEN IN DISK, WHERE "THE DEMOCRATIC LEFT" TRADE UNIONISTS WHO FAVOR THE RPP HAVE CHALLENGED THE MORE RADICAL LEADERS, INCLUDING DISK PRESIDENT KEMAL TURKLER, WHO SEEK GREATER COHESIVENESS ON THE LEFT THROUGH LINKS WITH "PROGRESSIVE" ORGANIZATIONS OUTSIDE THE RANKS OF LABOR.

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4. POSSIBLE TRENDS TOWARD NEW LABOR-POLITICAL ALIGNMENTS:

A. THE SEVERE CONFLICTS WITHIN TURK-IS AND DISK RAISE THE SPECTER OF FURTHER FRAGMENTATION OF THE LABOR MOVEMENT AND REALIGNMENT OF AFFILIATIONS ALONG POLITICAL PARTY LINES. THE POSSIBILITY EXISTS THAT THE LEFT WING OF TURK-IS COULD JOIN WITH THE MODERATES OF DISK AND FORM A NEW SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC CONFEDERATION ALLIED WITH THE RPP. IN THAT EVENT, TURK-IS WOULD SURVIVE AS AN APPENDAGE OF THE JP, AND DISK WOULD

BECOME A RALLYING GROUND FOR THE FAR-LEFT RADICALS.

B. BUT EVEN UNDER THE STRAINS DEVELOPED IN THE PRESENT
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POLITICAL CLIMATE, IT SEEMS UNLIKELY THAT SUCH REGROUPING WILL
OCCUR. RPP CHAIRMAN ECEVIT IS REPORTED TO OPPOSE IT AS HE
FAVORS INSTEAD COOPERATION BETWEEN TURK-IS AND DISK IN BOTH
OF WHICH HE CLAIMS SUBSTANTIAL SUPPORT FROM THE RANK-AND-FILE.

5. LABOR'S CURRENT AND FUTURE INFLUENCE ON POLITICAL
DECISION-MAKING:

A. ORGANIZED LABOR REMAINS THE LARGEST NON-GOVERNMENTAL
ENTITY IN THE COUNTRY AND CONSTITUTES A HAPPY HUNTING GROUND
FOR POLITICIANS SEEKING SUPPORT AT THE POLLS. IT IS ALSO THE
LARGEST NON-PARTY BLOC IN A DEMOCRACY WHERE LOBBYING BY INTEREST
GROUPS IS STILL IN AN EARLY STAGE OF DEVELOPMENT. ITS POLITICAL
LEVERAGE, ALTHOUGH NOW AT ITS LOWEST LEVEL IN YEARS, CAN BE
SIGNIFICANT WHEN SOCIAL LEGISLATION IS BEING CONSIDERED IN
PARLIAMENT. LABOR'S PARLIAMENTARY REPRESENTATION IS
SMALL--FOUR DEPUTIES (ONE RPP, THREE JP) AND ONE
PRESIDENTIALLY-APPOINTED SENATOR (TURK-IS PRESIDENT HALIL
TUNC), BUT ITS ROLE AS LOBBIST IS BROADLY RESPECTED ON MATTERS
CONCERNING THE IMPROVEMENT OF LIVING STANDARDS AND WORKING
CONDITIONS. SIMILARLY, GOVERNMENT AGENCIES REGULARLY
CONSULT LABOR (E.G, ON DEVELOPMENT PLANS, AND THE PROBLEMS
OF TURKISH WORKERS ABROAD), AND LABOR PARTICIPATES AS A
FULL PARTNER IN SUCH STATUTORY BOARDS AS THOSE FOR CONCILIATION,
MANIMUM WAGES, PRODUCTIVITY AND SOCIAL INSURANCE.

B. WHETHER THE CONFLICT OVER THE LABOR MOVEMENT'S
POLITICAL ROLE IS FINALLY RESOLVED OR NOT, PROBABLY THE MOST
MEANINGFUL FUTURE PROSPECTS FOR ORGANIZED LABOR'S INFLUENCE LIE
IN THE LONG-TERM SOCIAL-POLITICAL EFFECTS OF ITS TRADITIONAL
ROLE IN INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS--COLLECTIVE BARGAINING TO WIN
BENEFITS AND TO PROTECT THE INTERESTS OF MEMBERS. IN PRIVATE
CONVERSATION, TURK-IS PRESIDENT TUNC NOTED RECENTLY
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THE TRADE UNIONS HAVE SUCCEEDED IN RAISING THE STATUS OF
INDUSTRIAL WORKERS WITHIN TURKISH SOCIETY. THE WHITE COLLAR
EMPLOYEE OR CIVIL SERVANT USED TO CONSIDER IT AN INSULT TO BE
CALLED A WORKER, HE SAID; BUT AS THE BENEFITS FLOWING FROM
COLLECTIVE AGREEMENTS NOW EXCEED THOSE PROVIDED FOR CIVIL
SERVANTS OR THE UNORGANIZED, THE RESPECTABILITY OF UNION

MEMBERSHIP IS UNIVERSALLY ACCEPTED. MANY GOVERNMENT
EMPLOYEES, EVEN PROFESSIONAL PEOPLE LIKE ENGINEERS, WANT
TO BE CLASSIFIED AS WORKERS, NOT CIVIL SERVANTS, SO THEY CAN
PROFIT THROUGH NEGOTIATED CONTRACTS. TRADE UNIONISM AND
COLLECTIVE BARGAINING, TUNC CONCLUDED, HAVE WROUGHT A
SIGNIFICANT SOCIAL CHANGE FOR INDUSTRIAL WORKERS. WE WOULD
ADD THAT THIS KIND OF ATTITUDINAL CHANGE IS BOUND TO HAVE
BROAD CONSEQUENCES FOR POLITICAL VALUES AND POLITICAL
DECISIONS.
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